

TRANSFORMING BREAST CANCER TOGETHER



EUROPEAN ELECTIONS MANIFESTO 2019

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BREAST CANCER PATIENTS

Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in women and European women's probability of developing breast cancer over a lifetime is approximately 1 in 8.¹ Due to its high incidence, breast cancer has the highest health care costs of all cancer-related health care costs in Europe. In the advanced stages, breast cancer is incurable although treatable. Personal, social and working relationships of women suffering from the advanced stage disease are deeply damaged but can be improved with proper treatment and care.

Breast cancer is not only a population health problem, but also a socio-economic problem with huge economic burden caused by lost productivity. Stark inequalities in clinical outcomes and access for breast cancer patients across Europe, indicate how diverse European **healthcare systems are in terms of their capacity to provide equal high-quality care for all**. Inequalities exist not only among countries but also among regions within the same national boundaries. Even though breast cancer incidence is higher in Northern, Southern and Western Europe, survival is higher in those regions than in Eastern Europe² where outcomes are poorer due to late diagnosis, lack of coordinated cancer care and low access to systemic therapies.

Breast cancer and advanced breast cancer thus remain a serious threat to women, families and to European society.

This Manifesto comes at a crucial time for the EU, with European Parliament elections taking place in May 2019 and a new European Commission taking office in November 2019. The coming months will be critical for European policymakers, as goals and priorities of the European Union for the next five years will be discussed and agreed upon.

Despite healthcare governance within the European Union being predominantly a competence of the individual member states, the EU does have a mandate and obligation in the policy domain of public health. In this respect, EU institutions play a key role in promoting policies to ensure high quality and equitable cancer care across Europe and prioritization of resource allocation towards this goal.

The 'Transforming Breast Cancer Together' initiative therefore calls on the incoming Members of the European Parliament and the European Commission as a whole, to ensure that breast cancer prevention, screening and care is a priority during their mandate and ranks highly on both the EU and Member States agendas.

In this context, this Initiative has identified four priority areas where the EU needs to take concrete action on breast cancer.

Therefore, we urge the incoming policy makers to:



1. Ensure breast cancer is screened, diagnosed and treated at an early stage

There are major differences across the individual EU member states in breast cancer screening and care, which result in some countries having much lower survival rates than others. These inequalities demand that European and national decision-makers assign the highest priority to initiate the much-needed measures necessary to see a consistent and continued improvement in survival rates. This priority action will see the EU make progress in the fight against breast cancer.

1. European Commission Initiative on Breast Cancer (2018) "Recommendations from European Breast Guidelines" Accessible here.

2. Allemani C et al. Global surveillance of trends in cancer survival 2000-14 (CONCORD-3): analysis of individual records for 37 513 025 patients diagnosed with one of 18 cancers from 322 population-based registries in 71 countries. *Lancet*. 2018 Mar 17;391(10125):1023-1075



The EU needs to invest in both primary and secondary prevention to highlight risk factors and ensure breast cancer is screened, diagnosed and treated at an early stage, when there is the greatest opportunity to ensure the best long-term survival.



Our concrete recommendations:

- **Revise the 2003 Council recommendations on cancer screening.**
- **Ensure implementation of nationwide mammography screening programs** conducted in accordance with the New European Guidelines being developed by the European Commission Initiative on Breast Cancer across Europe.
- **Ensure that every patient diagnosed with breast cancer has access to the highest standard of treatment in a specialist breast-unit** (centre) with dedicated breast specialists working with a multidisciplinary approach including patients with advanced and metastatic breast cancer. Ongoing needs for care and psychosocial services for all women with breast cancer should be co-ordinated by the specialist breast unit.
- Foster a favourable environment for and dedicate sufficient funding to programmes designed to **equip providers with the knowledge and skills that address patients' needs beyond the physical and to embrace the need for psychological care** as an integral part of a comprehensive treatment plan.



2. Ensure return to work programmes for breast cancer patients and survivors

There are numerous hurdles for all patients and survivors, from diagnosis, which usually results in long periods of sick-leave because of medical treatments and other functional restrictions, to the 'after' period, where many cancer survivors still face long-term symptoms and impairments after their treatment ends, such as fatigue, thinking and memory problems and peripheral neuropathy, making it more difficult to remain in or re-enter the job market.

Work is an important aspect of those affected by breast cancer and can restore a sense of normality and wellbeing as well contribute to financial stability. However, most cancer survivors find returning to work very difficult as they deal with cancer's side effects.



Our concrete recommendations:

- Ensure the **development and implementation of programmes that support breast cancer survivors to flexibly return to work**, look after their families and contribute to society before, during and after treatment.
- **Develop and implement information, guidelines and toolkits** designed specifically for employees with cancer, employers, carers, family members, and health professionals in all EU Member States.
- Use tools such as the **European Social Pillar to strengthen and reinforce the principles and guidelines for equal opportunities and workplace inclusion** of breast cancer survivors.



3. Maintain a favourable environment for the collection of breast cancer data and the development of innovative health technologies

New research on cancer provides hope for the development of new treatments, but it can also add a new layer of complexity. Substantial improvements in oncology offer the hope to patients and society that innovation can bring real value and address the burden that breast cancer brings. Indeed, the potential for further significant scientific advances in the prevention, detection, treatment and management of breast cancer is high, building on the findings from research in recent years.

However, if we do not ensure that policymakers maintain a favourable environment for breast cancer research, from increasing spending levels to facilitating the gathering and use of key data, we will not be able to address the gaps in diagnosis, treatment and care which subsist across Europe. To do this will require increased dedication to addressing the current challenges and creating a favourable environment to foster research and innovation in breast cancer cure and care.



Our concrete recommendations:

- **Put breast cancer research at the top of the EU research agenda and increase the spending on breast cancer research** through a dedicated research 'mission' in the upcoming Horizon Europe framework programme.
- **Deepen cooperation on breast cancer research in Europe** and increase cross disciplinary collaboration.
- **Develop a harmonized breast cancer registry process** in Europe to collect breast cancer data, both for early breast cancer and metastatic breast cancer.
- **Collect patient reported outcomes and re-evaluate treatments in the post-marketing authorisation phase**, for a better understanding of the value of the treatment.

About the Transforming Breast Cancer Together Initiative

'Transforming Breast Cancer Together' initiative was established in November 2017, by Lieve Wierinck (ALDE) and Elena Gentile (S&D), Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The ultimate goal of this initiative is to improve services for patients in an area of still high unmet need and reduce the societal impact of breast cancer by elevating it as a health policy priority in order to improve breast cancer prevention, diagnosis and care across Europe.

The initiative is driven by a group that currently includes Members of the European Parliament Lieve Wierinck (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – ALDE), Elena Gentile (Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats – S&D) and Cristian-Silviu Buşoi (European People's Party – EPP), ABC Global Alliance, Eli Lilly and Company, Europa Donna – The European Breast Cancer Coalition, European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC), European School of Oncology (ESO), European Society of Breast Cancer Specialists (EUSOMA), European Society of Surgical Oncology (ESSO), GE Healthcare, Helsinn, Novartis and Working With Cancer.